

Morristown Encampment: A Chronology

(The following represents dates, events and commentary that provide highlights of the story of the Morristown encampment.)

Thursday, November 4, 1779

“The weather begins to get cold and puts us in mind of winter quarters...It therefore becomes [sic] necessary to look out for a proper place to hut the army in.” (*Quartermaster General Nathanael Greene instructing Colonel James Abeel that the Quartermaster department should start to locate a place for the winter encampment of the Continental Army troops directly under the command of General George Washington.*)

Saturday, November 20, 1779

General Greene arrives in Morristown, New Jersey to personally oversee the search.

Wednesday, November 24, 1779

At West Point: “I am now using my best endeavours to get things in train for putting the army in quarters. The instant matters will permit, I shall go forward myself.” (*General Washington to the President of Congress.*)

Tuesday, November 30, 1779 “6 Oclock P.M.”

At Pompton N.J. “From a consideration of all circumstances, I am led to decide upon the position back of Mr Kimbles,... (*the property behind that of the Kemble estate, known as Jockey Hollow*) I shall be at Morristown tomorrow and shall be obliged your ordering me a late dinner. I understand my quarters are to be at Mrs. Fords. If I am mistaken, be pleased to send me a person to set me right.” (*General Washington in a letter to General Nathanael Greene of his decision of where to locate his Main Army’s winter encampment.*) .

Wednesday, December 1, 1779

General Washington arrives at Morristown, New Jersey and moves into the home of Theodosia Ford.

“I certify that the Commander in Chief took up his quarters at Mrs. Ford’s in Morris Town the first day of December 1779,...” *Certificate of Occupation, sent to Theodosia Ford by Col. Richard Kidder Meade, Aide de Camp to General Washington, July 26, 1780.*)

“I arrived here on Wednesday the 1st instant, and am exerting myself to get the Troops hutted in the Country lying between Morris Town and Mendham, about three mile from the former. I intended, so I had the honor of informing Congress, to have quartered the Troops in the Neighborhood of Scots plains, but it was found upon examination, that the Country did not afford a position compatible with our security and which could also supply water and wood for covering and fuel; considerations as well as that of security, not to be dispensed with.” (*General George Washington to the President of Congress December 4, 1779*)

Saturday, December 4, 1779 – Thursday, December 9, 1779

The Commander-In-Chief’s Guards (the regiment that protected General Washington and his Headquarters) arrive on the 4th, pitch their tents and build their huts across the road from the Ford Mansion.

December 1 - December 17, 1780

The brigades that will winter in Jockey Hollow arrive at their campsites. Stark’s brigade (made up of Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts regiments) arrived on the 14th of the month. A surgeon with this brigade, Dr. James Thatcher, wrote: “On the 14th (we) reached this wilderness, about three miles from Morristown, where we are to build log huts for winter quarters...The ground is marked out, and the soldiers have commenced cutting down the timber of oak and walnut, of which we have a great abundance.” (*Dr. James Thatcher, Military Journal*)

Tuesday, December 7, 1779

“We have taken up our quarters at this place for the winter. The main army lies within three or four miles of the town.” (*General Washington to William Livingston, Governor of New Jersey.*)

Tuesday, December 14, 1779

“I must confess that the [*soldiers*] would make a better appearance had they a sufficiency of *hats*, but as Congress don’t seem to think *that* an essential ...part of uniform, they mean to leave us uniformly bare-headed—as well as bare-footed—and if they find that we can *bare* it tolerably well in the two extremes, perhaps they may try it in the *center*.” (*General Anthony Wayne to General William Irvine*)

Thursday, December 16, 1779

“The situation of the Army with respect to supplies, is beyond description, alarming. It has been five or six weeks past on half allowance, and we have not more than three days bread at a third allowance on hand, nor any where within reach. When this is exhausted, we must depend on the precarious gleanings of the neighboring country. Our magazines (*storehouses*) are absolutely empty everywhere, and our commissaries entirely destitute of money or credit to replenish them. We have never experienced a like extremity at any period of the war. We have often felt temporary want from accidental delay in forwarding supplies, but we always had something in our magazines, and the means of procuring more. Neither one nor the other is, at present, the case. This representation is the result of a minute examination of our resources. (*General Washington to Joseph Reed, Governor of Pennsylvania.*)

Friday, December 24, 1779

“You will by date perceive that we are in camp, tho’ expect, if good weather, to have the men’s Hutts so far compleated (*sic*) that they may go into them on Sunday or Monday. The severity of the weather hath been such that the men suffer’d much without shoes and stockings, and working half leg deep in snow. Poor fellows, my heart bleeds for them as I damn my country as devoid of gratitude.” (*Lt. Colonel Ebenezer Huntington of Col. Samuel Webb’s Connecticut Regiment, Stark’s Brigade*)

Saturday, December 25, 1779

Washington hires one of the military Bands of Musick (usually from a artillery regiment) to play at Headquarters for Christmas. “the Band of Musick – Christmas 15 pounds” (*Record for December 25th in expense account for Headquarters.*)

Monday, December 27, 1779

Morristown: Masonic meeting of officers at the Arnold Tavern

Friday, December 31, 1779

Martha Washington arrives at the Ford Mansion; Major Gibbs (Commander of the Guards) had been sent with Washington’s sleigh to bring her up from Philadelphia to Morristown. Mrs. Washington will stay at Morristown until mid-June 1780.

Monday, January 3- Wednesday, January 5, 1780

A long and severe storm dumps feet of snow on the winter camp, and large snowdrifts on the roads prevents supplies of food entering camp. “At one time it snowed the greater part of four days successively, and there fell nearly as many feet deep of snow, and here was the keystone of the arch of starvation. We were absolutely, literally starved. I do solemnly declare that I did not put a single morsel of victuals into my mouth for four days and as many nights, except a little black birch bark which I gnawed off a stick of wood, if that can be called victuals. I saw several of the men roast their old shoes and eat them, and I was afterwards informed by one of the officer’s waiters that some of the officers killed and ate a favorite little dog that belonged to them. If this was not “suffering,” I request to be informed what can pass under that name. (*Nineteen-year old Private Joseph Plumb Martin, Connecticut Brigade*)

“Our Army is without Meat and Bread: and have been for two or three days past. Poor Fellows! They exhibit a picture truly distressing. More that half naked, and above two thirds starved.” (*General Nathanael Greene to Moore Furman, Morristown, N.J., Tuesday, January 4th 1780*)

“Here we are surrounded with Snow banks, and it well we are, for if it was good traveling, I believe the Soldiers would take up their packs and march, they having been without provision two or three days. The distress of the Army is very great, and not less on account of clothing than provisions, hundreds and hundreds being without shirts and many other necessary articles of clothing....God have mercy on us, we have little to hope and everything to fear....A few Cattle arrived this morning or else the Army must have disbanded or let loose upon the Inhabitants: the latter would have been the case; But you know how cautious the Genl [*Washington*] is of taking desperate measures.” (*General Nathanael Greene to Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth, January 5th 1780*)

Friday, January 6(?) 1780

Sir: The army is upon the eve of disbanding for want of Provisions, the poor soldiers having been several days without, and there not being more that a sufficiency to serve one Regiment in the Magazine. Provision is scarce at best, but the late terrible storm and the depth of the Snow and the drifts in the Roads prevent the little stock coming forward which is in readiness at the distant Magazines. (*General Nathanael Greene to Colonel Benoni Hathaway.*)

Saturday, January 8, 1780

General Washington sends a circular letter to the magistrates of New Jersey seeking assistance for his starving troops, calling on the “virtuous Inhabitants” for “Grain and Cattle” to meet the present distress, due to the “early commencement and uncommon vigor of the Winter.”

“The present situation of the army with respect to provision, is the most distressing of any we have experienced since the beginning of the war. For a fortnight (*two weeks*) past the troops, both officers and men, have been almost perishing for want. They have been alternately without bread or meat the whole time, with a very scanty allowance of either and frequently destitute of both. They have borne their sufferings with a patience that merits the approbation and ought excite the sympathy of their Countrymen.” Some of the troops have been reduced to stealing from the inhabitants, which Washington disapproved of. But under these severe conditions such acts could “could only be lamented as the effect of an unfortunate necessity.” A copy of this circular was sent to each county, with the amount of the bushels of grain and head of cattle required from that county. The veiled threat of impressment is given if the supplies are not forthcoming. (quotes from *The Writings of George Washington*, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor, Volume 17, pages 362-65)

Sunday, January 9, 1780

“Our Affairs are in so deplorable a condition (on the score of provisions) as to fill the Mind with the most anxious and alarming fears (Men half-starved, imperfectly Cloathed, riotous, and robbing the Country people of their subsistence from sheer necessity)” (*General Washington describing the troops to General Irvine.*) But if the opportunity of a “firm and solid bridge of ice between them and us” presents itself, he would consider a raid on the British on Staten Island.

Tuesday, January 11, 1780

“Such weather as we have had, never did I feel. For six or eight days it has been so extremely cold, that there was no living abroad; the snow it is also very deep, and much drifted; it is so much so, that we drive over the tops of the fences. In the midst of snow and surrounded on every side by its banks, the army has been cut off from its magazines, [*supply storehouses*] and been obliged to fast for several days together. We have been alternately out of meat and bread for eight or nine days past, and without either for three or four. The distress of the army has been exceedingly great from the weather, want of clothing and provisions. But the soldiers have borne it with great patience and fortitude. They have displayed a degree of magnanimity under their sufferings which does them the highest honour....” (*General Nathanael Greene to an Unidentified Person*)

Friday, January 14 - Saturday, January 15, 1780

American attack on Staten Island.

Saturday, January 22, 1780

"I have been at my prest. Quarters since the 1st day of Dec[embe]r. and have not a Kitchen to cook a Dinner in, altho' the Logs have been put together some considerable time by my own Guard. Nor is there a place at this moment in which a servant can lodge, with the smallest degree of comfort. Eighteen belonging to my family, and all Mrs. Ford's, are crowded together in her Kitchen, and scarce one of them able to speak for the colds they have caught." (*General Washington to General Greene.*)

Tuesday, January 25, 1780

In retaliation for the American raid on Staten Island, British and German mercenary forces attack Newark and Elizabethtown. The American posts are surprised in the raid; with over 60 troops captured, and buildings such as the Newark Academy and the Elizabeth Courthouse and Presbyterian church burned.

Wednesday, January 26, 1780

Conclusion of court-martial on charges against General Benedict Arnold for acts committed while military governor of Philadelphia. They recommend a reprimand by the Commander in Chief. This may have been a contributing factor in Arnold's transformation to traitor.

Saturday, January 29, 1780

"With respect to provision, the situation of the army is comfortable at present on this head and I ardently pray, that it may never be again as it has been of late. We were reduced to a most painful and delicate extremity; such as rendered the keeping of the troops together a point of great doubt. The exertions of the magistrates and inhabitants of this State were great and cheerful for our relief." (*General Washington to Elbridge Gerry.*)

Catherine Greene (who is living in the Arnold Tavern with her husband, General Nathanael Greene) gives birth to a boy, Nathanael Ray Greene.

Monday, February 10th 1780

Dear Sir We have had the most terrible winter here that ever I know. Almost all the wild beasts of the fields, and the birds of the Air, have perished with the cold. All the Bays, Rivers and Creeks are froze up. Nature has given us a fine bridge of communication with the enemy, but we are too weak to take advantage of it. (*General Nathanael Greene to Governor William Greene of Rhode Island*)

Saturday, February 12, 1780

"Those who have only been in Valley Forge or Middlebrook during the last two winters, but have not tasted the cruelties of this one, know not what it is to suffer." (*Major General John Kalb*)

Saturday, February 19, 1780

The Hudson River near New York City freezes. "The passage of the North [Hudson] River, even in its widest part...was about the 19th [of February] practicable for the heaviest cannon, an event unknown in the memory of man." (*New York: British Major General Pattison to Lord George Germain in London, February 22, 1780*)

Wednesday, February 23, 1780

First dancing assembly held by officers, in the military storehouse built by the army near the Morristown green. Thirty-four officers, including Washington, each contribute \$400 to hold a series of dances during the encampment. "The house we propose to hold our assemblies at, is nearly built in Morristown, the drawing room 70 feet long by 40 broad, and two drawing rooms down stairs." (*Col. Walter Stewart*) "Last Wednesday commenced the great Military Assembly at Morristown. His Excellency opened the ball with Mrs. Knox. As the weather was cool, there were but sixteen ladies and from fifty to sixty

gentlemen present. There was great order and regularity observed. (*Joseph Brown to William Irvine, February 29, 1780.*)

Tuesday, February 29, 1780

“We have opened an assembly at Camp. From this apparent ease, I suppose it is though we must be in happy circumstances. I wish it were so, but, alas, it is not. Our provisions are in a manner, gone. We have not a ton of hay at command, nor magazine (*storehouse*) to draw from. Money is extremely scarce, and worth little when we get it. We have been so poor in camp for a fortnight, (*two weeks*) that we could not forward the public dispatches, for want of cash to support the expresses.” (*General Green to Joseph Reed*)

Wednesday, March 1, 1780

Second dancing assembly held by the officers (See February 23 and April 24)

Tuesday, March 2, 1780

“I have many things to say to you, but was at the Assembly last Night and feel not a little fatigued and clouded. We are merry at Camp but have little to eat either for man [or] beast. Our political concerns grow worse and worse. We are now so poor in Camp, that I have not money to pay the expenses of the Express riders to carry the public dispatches. Our provisions is out and forage gone. The roads are impassible and no communication to be had across the Delaware.[*River*] Thus we are shet (*sic*) up in Morristown without the bare hope of deliverence...” (*General Nathanael Greene to Colonel Jeremiah Wadsworth*)

Friday, March 17, 1780

St Patrick’s Day—in general orders issued the previous day, General Washington proclaims the day a holiday in camp. , “...the General directs that all fatigue and working parties cease for to-morrow the SEVENTEENTH instant, a day held in particular regard by the people of (Ireland.)” (*General Orders: Headquarters, Morristown, March 16, 1780*)

“While the troops are Celebrating the anniversary of ST. PATRICK in Innocent Mirth and Pastime he hopes they will not forget our Worthy Friends in the Kingdom of IRELAND, who with the Greatest unanimity have step’d forth in Opposition to the tyranny of Great Britain and who like US are determined to be FREE.” (*Division Orders, Pennsylvania Brigades, Col. Chambers, Commanding.*)

Saturday, March 18

“The oldest people now living in this country do not remember so hard a winter as the one we are now emerging from. In a word, the severity of the frost exceeded anything of the kind that had ever been experienced in this climate before.” (*Washington to the Marquis de Lafayette, at Paris*)

Monday, March 27, 1780

Council of War held at Headquarters: General Washington discusses with the generals whether troops from camp should be sent to South Carolina, which was under British attack. The unanimous decision was in the negative.

Saturday, April 1, 1780

Council of War held at Headquarters—With the word of additional British troops being sent to South Carolina, Washington and the other generals decide to send about 2,000 men to that area. The Maryland brigades leave camp on April 17, their huts soon occupied by the New Jersey Brigade.

Wednesday, April 19, 1780

General Washington leaves Headquarters in the morning to welcome and escort to the Ford Mansion some special guests: “The Chevalier de la Luzerne, Minister of France, with another French gentleman, and Don Juan de Miralles, a gentleman of distinction from Spain, arrived at headquarters from Philadelphia, in company with his Excellency General Washington... (*Dr. Thatcher—Military Journal*) The Spanish agent takes ill with “a violent biliary complaint.”

Friday, April 21, 1780

“General Washington accompanied his illustrious visitors to take a distant view of the enemy’s position and works on (New) York and Staten Island, and of the different posts of our army, while preparations were making for a grand field review of our troops.” (*Dr. James Thatcher—Military Journal*) The total party that viewed the American outposts at Elizabeth and Springfield numbered around forty.

Monday, April 24, 1780

“a field of parade being prepared under the direction of the Baron Steuben, four battalions of our army were presented for review, by the French minister, attended by his Excellency and our general officers. Thirteen cannon, as usual, announced their arrival in the field, and they received from the officers and soldiers the military honors due to their military rank. In the evening, General Washington and the French ministry, attended a ball provided by our principal officers, at which were present a numerous collection of ladies and gentlemen of distinguished character.” (*Thatcher—Military Journal*) This is the last of the series of dancing assemblies.

Tuesday, April 25

“the whole army was paraded under arms, to afford M. de la Luzerne another opportunity of reviewing the troops, after which he was escorted part of the way to Philadelphia. The Spanish gentleman remained dangerously sick of a pulmonic fever at head quarters....” (*Thatcher—Military Journal*)

Friday, April 28, 1780

Death of the Spanish agent, Don Juan de Miralles at Headquarters (after a illness of about ten days.)

Arrival at Headquarters of a Committee of Congress (Philip Schuyler of New York, John Mathews of South Carolina, and Nathaniel Peabody of New Hampshire)

Saturday, April 29, 1780

Burial of de Miralles “The Remains of Don Juan De Miralles are to be inter’d this afternoon at Morris Town. The funeral procession will move from Head Quarters between 4 and 5 o’clock....” (*Colonel Scammell to General Irvine*)

Tuesday, May 9, 1780

“Our brigade was paraded for inspection and review by Baron Steuben, in the presence of his Excellency, General Washington. This troops appeared to much advantage, and the officers received the thanks of the Baron for the military and soldierly appearance of the men.” (*Thatcher—Military Journal*)

Wednesday, May 10, 1780

Arrival at Headquarters of the Marquis de Lafayette, just returned from France. He brings the news that the French fleet is on the way, with up to 6000 infantry to aid the American forces. He will depart on the 14th to report to the Continental Congress—arrives in Philadelphia the evening of the 15th.

“May 10th 1780 We have heard from the Marquis. He will be here at dinner. Will you dine with us also? The General (*Washington*) requests it. (*Postscript of letter from Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton at Headquarters to Baron von Steuben.*) “Marqs. de la Fayette is in this country. He is now here, a little indisposed with a cold, but will proceed on to Congress tomorrow or next day.” (*General Washington to James Duane, May 13, 1780*)

Thursday, May 25, 1780

Brief mutiny of the Eighth and Fourth Connecticut regiments in Jockey Hollow. (*A full account of this mutiny is given in Joseph Plumb Martin’s A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier... (1830) reprinted in a modern edition called Private Yankee Doodle.*)

Monday, May 29, 1780

“Four battalions of our troops were paraded for review by the committee of Congress, in the presence of General Washington; they were duly honored with the military salute.” (*Thatcher—Military Journal*) New York Brigade leaves camp to go to the Hudson Highlands in New York State.

Wednesday, May 31, 1780

“Certain I am that unless Congress speaks in a more decisive tone; unless they are vested with powers by the several States competent to the great purposes of War, or assume them as matter of right; and they, and the states respectively, act with more energy than they hitherto have done, that our Cause is lost....”
(General Washington to Joseph Jones, delegate to the Continental Congress from Virginia)

Tuesday, June 6, 1780

Council of War at Headquarters—With the expected French land and sea forces on the way, Washington and his generals discuss where to plan a joint attack on the British. A number of options are discussed.

Wednesday, June 7, 1780

British troops cross from Staten Island to Elizabethtown Point around midnight, June 6 and advance to Connecticut Farms (*now Union*) N.J.. Word of this reaches Washington in the early hours of June 7; he leaves the Ford Mansion and puts the army in motion. They reach the Short Hills (or heights of Springfield) ten miles southeast of Morristown, in the afternoon of the 7th. After some skirmishing, the British retired in the night, returning to Elizabethtown Point. Although this would be Washington’s departure from the Ford’s home, others of his entourage and some of his belongings would be in the house until June 23.